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ABSTRACT

This study tested predictions made for attitude change interactions between the source-message orientation of recipients of a persuasive communication and variables differentiating media and interpersonal communication. The variables were source orientation, message orientation, physical presence of source, and expected interaction with source. The subjects were 160 undergraduates at the University of Wisconsin, randomly assigned to conditions. In each session, the subjects completed source-message orientation scales and various disguised attitude assessment measures. They were given a brief description of the purported source of the message, and in one condition were told that the source wanted to discuss the message with them individually after the session. The subjects then received the message from the source either in person or on a sound, color film of the source. The high message-oriented subjects, not the high source-oriented, changed their attitudes in the direction of the message more when the source was physically present than when he appeared on film. These results were discussed as indicating the need for more precision in defining source variables. (Author/WR)

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Source-Message Orientation in Interpersonal and Media Influence

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Source-Message Orientation in Interpersonal and Media Influence

The growing body of literature dealing with source-message orientation, while based on data obtained in both interpersonal and mass communication settings, has yet to systematically address differences in influence due to those settings.

Source-message orientation, an indiviaual difference variable directly concerned with the components of the communication setting, considers persons who are highly concerned with the source when receiving a persuasive communication to be source-oriented and those most concerned with the message as message-oriented.

Whereas McDavid originally conceptualized source-message orientation in terms of interpersonal communication,[1] Stone has treated the variable more in general communication terms not limited to interpersonal influence. In a series of studies, he and his colleagues have found the source-message orientation of communication recipients to interact with various source and message variables so as to account for differential attitude change.[2]

In an early study Stone used the conceptual difference between his and McDavid's approach as a possible explanation for his failure to support attitude change predictions based on the McDavid model.[3] By noting this conceptual difference, Stone has assumed the operation of somewhat different variables in the interpersonal and media situations. While this assumption may be valid, for the most part it has yet to be tested.

Of the studies addressed to the question of differences between interpersonal and mass media communication,[4] few have systematically considered variables which may explain the differences obtained. McGuire considers the primary variable to be the opportunity for direct interaction between communicator and audience which exists in the face-to-face setting but not in the mass media setting.[5] Thus two-way channels are open in the interpersonal setting, but the usual media setting is one-way.

Another variable normally present in an interpersonal setting but not in a mass media setting is the actual physical presence of the source. Regardless of whether the recipient expects to interact with the source, the source is physically present in face-to-face communication but not when the message is communicated by a medium.

Each of these two variables -- direct interaction with the source and the physical presence of the source -- is normally present in an interpersonal communication setting, but absent in a media setting. By manipulating each of these variables independently, then analyzing each in terms of the source-message orientation of the audience members, it should be possible to obtain a more thorough understanding of the relationship between persuasive communication settings and personality characteristics of the individual message recipients.

Based on the conceptualization of source-message orientation, the present study predicted that the two source manipulations used in the study would influence attitude change more in high source-oriented subjects than in others. That is, subjects classified as high source-oriented were expected to show more attitude change than others when the message was delivered in person rather

than on film, and more change when discussion was anticipated with the source of the message than when no discussion was expected.

These predictions were, however, made with some caution. Stone and Hoyt found unexpectedly that anticipated discussion with the source enhanced attitude change not for high source-oriented, but rather for high message-oriented persons.[6] If a similar phenomenon would occur in the present study, it would be expected that the two source manipulations would affect attitude change more in the high message-oriented subjects than in the high source-oriented.

Method

With source-message orientation considered a two-dimensional variable, as suggested by Stone and Hoyt,[7] the present study used a 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design. The four variables were: a) source orientation, b) message orientation, c) physical presence of source, and d) expected interaction with source. For comparative purposes, source-message orientation was also analyzed as a one-dimensional variable using the instrument developed by Stone and Hoyt.[8] In this case the factorial design was a 3 x 2 x 2, with three levels of source-message orientation (source-oriented, intermediate, or message-oriented) and the same two manipulated variables.

Subjects were 160 undergraduates (78 male and 82 female) at the University of Wisconsin who were enrolled in an introductory mass communications course in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication or an introductory radio-television-film course in the Department of Communication Arts. Most were sophomores.

The main dependent variable in the before-after design was attitude change on the issue of allowing television cameras to cover courtroom proceedings. The message, which had been successfully used in a number of previous studies, strongly advocated permitting television to have access to courtrooms.[9] Attitudes were assessed by 7-point scales for five agree-disagree items expressing various positions on the cameras-in-the-courtroom issue. The five attitude assessment items were selected from an original list of eight by an internal consistency item analysis conducted earlier as a pre-test.[10] Attitude change scores consisted of the differences between initial and post-message scores summed across the five items.

While the physical presence independent variable was fairly easy to operationalize, the personal interaction variable was not. Experimental control would be lost if interaction actually occurred because the discussion would be structured in part by the recipient's responses, which would not be under control of the investigator. The present study overcame this problem by using a procedure successfully used previously by Stone and Hoyt.[11] The procedure uses the expectation of the discussion as a close approximation to the discussion actually occurring, presuming that whatever psychological processes are activated to prepare for an interpersonal encounter also exist at the time the recipient is fully expecting the interaction to take place.

The subjects participated in small groups, with most testing sessions containing between five and seven. The conditions were randomly assigned by experimental session, with 29 testing sessions being held.

When the subjects arrived for the experiment they were met by the experimenter, an undergraduate woman, who administered a mimeographed

booklet containing attitude assessment items and all personality scales. The five attitude assessment items were imbedded in a longer "Mass Media Survey" which also contained nine filler items dealing with other current mass media issues. Source-message orientation was categorized using the two-dimensional and one-dimensional instruments. The first booklet also contained measures of the amount of time the subjects normally spent with the various news media, and their evaluations of media performance. These measures were used as covariates to determine if the subjects' prior experiences with the news media or attitudes toward them in any way affected their performances in the study.

After completing the first booklet the subjects were given tape recorded instructions telling them they were to evaluate a message prepared by a person at the university. The taped instruction then described the source of the particular message they would hear as, "Mr. James L. Hoyt, the chairman of the Current Legal Issues Research Committee of the Wisconsin Law School." This description was intended to portray the source as highly expert, as well as impartial, on the courtroom television issue.

In the "anticipated discussion" conditions, subjects were told in the taped instructions that the source wanted to discuss the message individually with each of them after they had completed their evaluations, whereas when interaction was not to be expected, they were told the procedure consisted solely of hearing the message, then evaluating it. In the "physical presence" condition the source appeared live in front of the subjects to deliver the message, while in the "no physical presence" condition he was seen on a sound, color film.

After exposure to the message, the subjects were given a second mimeographed booklet, this one containing a number of message evaluation items as well as the same five critical attitude assessment items which were in the first booklet. Like the attitude items, the evaluations were also followed by 7-point scales. In addition to providing data to help interpret the results of the study, the evaluation items were intended to add plausibility to the study's announced purpose.

Results

Subject Groups and Sex of Subjects. Because the subjects were drawn from two college courses and included both males and females, analyses of variance were conducted to determine if either variable (subject group or sex) affected subject performance. The results of these analyses indicated there were no main effects (all $F<1$) or interactions (all $F<1$) involving either of the variables, thus males and females were grouped together and the two subject groups were combined for subsequent analyses.

Orientation Classification. Relative procedures were used to divide the various source-message orientation distributions into their components. Using the two-dimensional instrument, 77 subjects were classified as high source-oriented and 83 as low source-oriented. And of the 160 subjects, 82 were classified high message-oriented and 78 low message-oriented. On the one-dimensional instrument, 56 were classified as source-oriented, 50 as message-oriented, and 54 as intermediates.

When comparing scores on the one-dimensional and two-dimensional instruments, the pattern was virtually identical with that reported by Milbourn and Stone.[12] That is, the majority (57%) of those subjects

classified as source-oriented by the one-dimensional instrument were high source-oriented by the two-dimensional approach. Likewise, 68% of those categorized as message-oriented using the one-dimensional approach were classified as high message-oriented when the variable was considered two-dimensionally. Also, those subjects termed intermediates on the one-dimensional instrument were again concentrated in two cells in the two-dimensional classification, those cells being the high source-oriented--high message-oriented and the low source-oriented--low message-oriented.

Attitude Change. The one-dimensional classification of source-message orientation failed to yield any significant main effects or interactions for attitude change. However, the two-dimensional approach revealed a significant interaction between message orientation and the physical presence of the source ($F=5.79, df=1/144, p<.025$). The pattern of this interaction (Figure 1) was such

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Figure 1 about here
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that the physical presence manipulation had little effect on the low message-oriented subjects, but did affect the high message-oriented. Those who heard the persuasive message in person changed their attitudes in the direction of the message more than did the individuals who heard the message on film.

The interaction between source orientation and physical presence was not significant ($F=2.32, df=1/144$, n.s.), nor were the interactions between either of the orientation variables and expected discussion with the source (both $F<1$).

A series of covariance analyses was conducted, covarying for various aspects of the subjects' prior experiences with and attitudes toward the news

media. None of the covariance results was different from the analyses of variance for attitude change. Thus neither prior attitudes about the media nor previous experiences with the media appeared to influence the results.

Message Evaluations. The subjects completed five different evaluations of various aspects of the persuasive message. A total message evaluation measure was then constructed for each subject by summing the responses on these individual items. Of particular interest to the present study were the findings of main effects for both the message orientation and physical presence variables. The high message-oriented subjects evaluated the message more positively ($F=6.15, df=1/144, p<.025$) than did the low message-oriented. On summated scales ranging from 5 to 35, the high message-oriented gave the message a mean rating of 29.80, while the low message-oriented rated it at 28.20. The main effect for physical presence ($F=4.84, df=1/144, p<.05$) indicated that those who received the message from an in-person communicator rated the message more positively than did those who saw the film. The mean rating for those who heard the message live was 29.75, while those who saw the film gave a mean message evaluation rating of 28.30

Discussion

The present study, like the earlier Stone and Hoyt experiment,[13] found high message-oriented persons more affected than others by the particular "source" manipulations used. Such results, however, do not necessarily require a drastic modification of the theoretical framework of source-message orientation.

Rather, what appears to be emerging is a need to more clearly specify

the types of source manipulations employed. The manipulations used in the present study, derived from variables differentiating media and interpersonal communication, did not vary descriptions of the source. Only the communication settings were varied. When manipulating the description of the source's attractiveness, Stone and Hoyt had found high source-oriented persons persuaded more by a likable than by an unlikable source.[14] However, because the present study did not manipulate the source description, this basis for attitude change predictions may have been inappropriate.

At the same time, the physical presence of the source, likely drawing more attention to him, may have been largely irrelevant for the high source-oriented persons because, given their source orientations, their attention was already directed toward him. The high message-oriented persons, however, not necessarily oriented toward the source, were influenced by the physical presence manipulation even though it did not affect the high source-oriented.

While high source-oriented persons are attuned to different source background descriptions which cause the source to be seen in different lights, high message-oriented individuals are apparently more sensitive to the physical conditions of the communication setting. By taking such findings into account, precision can be added to predictions in order that different source characteristics can be given different, and appropriate, considerations.

The most pervasive message evaluation findings were the main effects for message orientation and physical presence. The message was rated more positively by high message-oriented persons than by others, and more positively when the source was present than when on film. These main effects help explain the attitude change interaction in that the same two variables which interacted to

increase attitude change when both were present, also independently resulted in more positive message evaluations.

The present study also supports the two-dimensional conceptualization of source-message orientation. This was seen in the comparison of the distributions of scores for the one- and two-dimensional approaches. Those persons who had been termed "intermediates" under the one-dimensional approach were found to make up two distinct groups when considered two-dimensionally, one oriented toward both the source and the message and the other toward neither. These results confirm the findings of Milbourn and Stone and support some tentative observations made by Stone and Chaffee.[15]

The results also hold implications for the issue of interpersonal and media communication. The findings, and those reported earlier by Stone and Hoyt,[16] show that the physical presence of the source and the expectation of face-to-face discussion with the source can increase attitude change for some people. Because the present study considers both of these variables to be critical in differentiating interpersonal and media communication, an obvious next step would be to compare different types of media presentations of messages vis-à-vis the source-message orientation of the audience members. For example, what would be the differential effect on persons of differing orientations of the same persuasive message delivered by film, by radio, or by print?

Footnotes

1 John McDavid Jr., "Personality and Situational Determinants of Conformity," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 58: 241-6 (1959).

2 Cf. Vernon A. Stone, "Individual Differences and Inoculation against Persuasion," Journalism Quarterly, 46: 267-73 (Summer 1969); Vernon A. Stone and Steven H. Chaffee, "Family Communication Patterns and Source-Message Orientation," Journalism Quarterly, 47: 239-46 (Summer 1970); Vernon A. Stone and James L. Hoyt, "Source-Message Orientation and Expectation of Discussion with the Source," Journalism Quarterly, 48: 741-4 (Winter 1971); M. Thomas Milbourn and Vernon A. Stone, "Source-Message Orientation and Components of Source Credibility," Journalism Quarterly, 49: 663-8 (Winter 1972); Vernon A. Stone and James L. Hoyt, "The Emergence of Source-Message Orientation as a Communication Variable," Communication Research, 1: 89-109 (1974).

3 Stone, op. cit.

4 Cf. Robert E. Lana, "Interest, Media and Order Effects in Persuasive Communications," Journal of Psychology, 56: 9-13 (1963); Elliott McGinnies, "A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Printed Communication versus Spoken Communication in Persuasion," Journal of Psychology, 60: 1-8 (1965).

5 William J. McGuire, "The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change," in Gardner Lindzey and Elliott Aronson, eds., The Handbook of Social Psychology, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), pp. 136-314.

6 Stone and Hoyt, "Source-Message Orientation and Expectation...," op. cit.

7 Stone and Hoyt, "The Emergence of Source-Message Orientation...," op. cit.

8 Stone and Hoyt, ibid.

9 E.g., Milbourn and Stone, op. cit., Stone and Hoyt, "Source-Message Orientation and Expectation...," op. cit., Stone and Hoyt, "The Emergence of Source-Message Orientation...," op. cit.

10 Details of the item analysis are contained in: James L. Hoyt, "Source-Message Orientation, Communication Media, and Attitude Change," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970.

11 Stone and Hoyt, "Source-Message Orientation and Expectation...," op. cit.

12 Milbourn and Stone, op. cit.

13 Stone and Hoyt, "Source-Message Orientation and Expectation...," op. cit.

14 Stone and Hoyt, "The Emergence of Source-Message Orientation...," op. cit.

15 Milbourn and Stone, op. cit.; Stone and Chaffee, op. cit.

16 Stone and Hoyt, "Source-Message Orientation and Expectation...," op. cit.

FIGURE 1

Attitude Change as a Function of Message Orientation and the Physical Presence of the Source